



File Code: 3420
Route To:

Date: September 21, 2004

Subject: Potential FY 2005 Forest Health Projects on El Rito RD (elritord)

To: Forest Supervisor, Carson National Forest

On September 1, Dave Conklin of our staff met with Dave Lawrence (El Rito Ranger District) to examine the planned Ensenada project area. The objective of this field visit was to look at several stands planned for thinning and possibly select some of them for treatment under our insect and disease prevention/suppression program.

The Ensenada area lies about five miles north of the village of Canon Plaza, in the northern part of the Vallecitos Sustained Yield Unit, and includes both ponderosa pine and mixed conifer forest types. This area was selectively logged around 1970, with the understories precommercially thinned to about six foot spacing in the late 1970s. Overstocking in the smaller size classes is evident throughout most of the area.

Several stands are currently slated for commercial harvest, others for non-commercial thinning only, and some areas for prescribed burning. During this visit, we primarily focused on areas where non-commercial thinning is planned and could be implemented in 2005. The stands we examined, along with our recommendations are as follows:

200134-10. This 55-acre stand is predominantly pole-size ponderosa pine with scattered larger trees. Moderate to heavy dwarf mistletoe infection occurs throughout much of the area, particularly the upper two-thirds of the stand. Although thinning could address the overstocked conditions here, it would also tend to stimulate the remaining mistletoe. Based on past experience, the level dwarf mistletoe is too high in many of the pole-size groups for good thinning results. Moreover, since road access is limited, there would be limited opportunity for removal of fuelwood, so thinning here could increase fuel-loading considerably. A few acres in the lower portion of this stand are both accessible and appear to be free of mistletoe; this portion of the stand could clearly benefit from thinning.

200134-19. This 50-acre mixed conifer stand lies on the opposite slope from stand 10 above. It is predominantly white fir and Douglas-fir, with occasional ponderosa pine and scattered inclusions of aspen. Although overstocked, recent mortality in the white fir and Douglas-fir has provided a significant amount of self-thinning. Most of the remaining Douglas-fir has dwarf mistletoe infection. Because of the recent self-thinning as well as deficiencies in quality "crop trees" we consider this stand a low priority for treatment.

200131-19. This 55-acre stand is mostly pole and small sawtimber-size ponderosa pine, with minor amounts of white fir and Douglas-fir. Dwarf mistletoe infection is light to moderate in the pine. This area is on gentle terrain with good road access, and would be a good candidate for thinning. We would recommend retaining the best dominant and codominant trees with the least



amount of mistletoe on an average (but variable) twenty foot spacing. All infected trees less than five inches dbh should be cut. Following thinning, this might be a good area to prescribe burn since fire would tend to further reduce mistletoe and kill some of the young fir regeneration.

200134-20. This 31-acre mature mixed conifer stand is tentatively planned for prescribed burning. Removal of some of the understory trees here to reduce ladder fuels prior to burning may be prudent; however, we agreed that such treatment would not fulfill any significant insect or disease objective.

200128-02. This 82-acre multi-aged mixed conifer area contains a variety of stand structures and pest conditions. Although primarily Douglas-fir and white fir, there is a significant component of ponderosa pine in many portions, along with inclusions of aspen. Evidence of past spruce budworm activity was widespread, with many of the understory fir having dead tops. Douglas-fir dwarf mistletoe infection centers were scattered throughout; in one such area, several large, heavily-infected trees had been attacked by Douglas-fir bark beetles in 2003 and 2004. The pine component was relatively healthy, with only a limited amount of mistletoe found in the upper corner of the stand.

We agreed that this stand is a good candidate for thinning. Although most of the overstocking is in the smaller size classes, there may also be opportunity to remove some commercial volume (such as the recently-killed Douglas-fir sawtimber). However, a non-commercial thin alone could also be quite beneficial here. Treatment should favor the remaining ponderosa pine, which will tend to reduce future budworm impact. We agreed to propose thinning all conifers to an average (but variable) 18 foot spacing, favoring dominant and codominant crowns. Douglas-fir and pine 5" dbh and larger with light mistletoe infection (DMR 1-2) could be retained, but all moderately and heavily infected trees (DMR 3-6) should be cut. All smaller infected trees should be cut. All trees with severe budworm damage, particularly dead tops, should also be cut.

Please contact us if you need further assistance in developing a project proposal for the Ensenada area.

/s/ Debra Allen-Reid
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cc: Leonard Lucero, David E Lawrence, Timothy Fruits, John Anhold, Diana M Trujillo